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## THINGS You SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ANTHRAX

- Anthrax is an **acute infectious disease caused by the spore-forming bacterium, *Bacillus anthracis*.**
- The **anthrax bacteria occur naturally in soil and animals.** It has been around for tens of thousands of years. It is not unusual for farmers to contract cutaneous (skin) anthrax and recover fully after treatment.
- **Anthrax is not contagious.** It cannot be passed from one person to another.
- **Nasal swab tests will not diagnose anthrax disease,** are unreliable for assessing exposure and should not be done. There is no screening test available for diagnosing anthrax infection in a person who is not exhibiting symptoms.
- Public health experts agree that clinical testing for anthrax is not necessary unless the individual has had **direct contact with a site or facility that has tested positive for the presence of anthrax spores,** or the individual has symptoms or signs compatible with anthrax disease.
- In people with symptoms or signs (for example, an atypical skin condition) compatible with anthrax, **specific tests to diagnose anthrax disease could include blood and skin cultures and skin biopsies.**
- Treatment for confirmed anthrax includes a variety of effective antibiotics. However, individuals with no known exposure to anthrax and no symptoms should resist the temptation to ask their doctors for a “just-in-case” prescription for antibiotics. **Misuse of antibiotics can be dangerous,** leading to severe side effects and allowing other harmful germs to grow unchecked.
- As a result of **recent bioterrorist incidents** using the mail, more than 2,000 New Jersey postal workers have been evaluated. To date, less than ten people have confirmed anthrax. All these patients are now recovering.
- Remember, as frightening as anthrax can be, **the flu poses a far greater risk for most people.** Each year, more than 20,000 people die in this country from influenza while millions more become ill due to the flu.
- Finally, if you were at a site where anthrax exposure was confirmed or if you have specific symptoms that are worsening rapidly, call your family physician or the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services at 609-538-6030 or 609-392-2020.

